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DEVELOPMENTS IN MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHING, A SUMMARY AND FORECAST.

BY- CIOFFARI, VINCENZO
NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSN., WASHINGTON, D.C.

PUB DATE OCT 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.28 5P.

DESCRIPTORS- *INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT, *MODERN LANGUAGES, *LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION, *INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY, *TEACHING METHODS, TEACHING TECHNIQUES, LANGUAGE LABORATORY USE, AUDIOLINGUAL METHODS, GRAMMAR TRANSLATION METHOD,

IN THE LAST 20 YEARS, SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LANGUAGE LEARNING, RESEARCH IN STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS, AND NEWLY-DEVELOPED TECHNOLOGY HAVE BROUGHT ABOUT REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES IN LANGUAGE-TEACHING METHODS. TO ACHIEVE AN IDEAL METHOD, THE POSSIBILITIES INHERENT IN THIS PROGRESS MUST BE EMPLOYED, AND THE IMPROVED METHODS BASED ON THE DISTINCT ADVANTAGES OF EACH OF THE PRE-AUDIOLINGUAL APPROACHES MUST BE ORGANIZED CONSIDERING EACH ASPECT OF THE LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS WITH RESPECT TO ITS RELATIVE IMPORTANCE WITHIN THE LANGUAGE. COMMUNICATION WILL CONTINUE TO BE REGARDED AS THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF LANGUAGE STUDY, HOPEFULLY WITH THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF UNDERSTANDING OTHER CULTURES. THE TREND TOWARD LONGER STUDY SEQUENCES WILL BE CONTINUED, ALTHOUGH IT HAS SO FAR HAD A DETRIMENTAL EFFECT ON ENROLLMENT IN "MINOR" AND UNCOMMONLY TAUGHT LANGUAGES. THE MOST STRIKING ADVANCES WILL BE BROUGHT ABOUT BY TECHNOLOGY--LANGUAGE LABORATORIES WILL BE TAILORED TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS, AND PRESENT LIMITATIONS WILL BE OVERCOME. TECHNIQUES WILL BE DEVELOPED, USING A METHOD LIKE THAT USED IN THE PATTERN DRILL, TO PRESENT "MICROCOSMS" OF FOREIGN CULTURE INTENDED TO PROVIDE AN AUTHENTIC ATMOSPHERE FOR THE LEARNING PROCESS. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "THE DFL BULLETIN," VOLUME 7, NUMBER 1, OCTOBER 1967, PAGES 11-14. (RW)

ED017220

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FL 000 743

BULLETIN the DFL BULLETIN

Published quarterly by the Department of Foreign Languages of the National Education Association, 1201 Sixteenth St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

The DFL Bulletin solicits and publishes original articles relating to the teaching of foreign languages. Points of view expressed in these articles may support or oppose positions taken by the Department of Foreign Languages as an organization.

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VOLUME VII • NUMBER 1 • OCTOBER 1967

Entered as third class matter at the post office in Washington, D.C. Subscription rate, $3.00 per year. Single copies, when available, 50¢ each. Order from the Department of Foreign Languages, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Address all inquiries regarding articles to the editors. Questions regarding advertising should be directed to the Managing Editor.

Developments in Modern Language Teaching—A Summary and Forecast

by Vincenzo Cioffari
Boston University

To say the teaching of modern language has undergone changes is indeed a platitude. To reiterate those changes before a group of teachers has come to be routine. Yet everyone involved in the teaching of modern languages must evolve for himself a basis of operation under the bombardment of new ideas. Routine was a comfortable mattress, but routine has been undermined and teachers are spending many sleepless hours. Let us review briefly the causes.

Traditional language teaching had evolved a routine bodily transmitted from one generation to the next. Of course, even traditional teaching was revolutionary in its day, but that revolution antedates our present teachers. It was quite a revolution to establish modern languages on a par with the classics, whose cultural values had gone unchanged. It was quite a revolution to study the speech of ordinary people against the literature of the masters. But long before our day that revolution had already taken place.

Modeled on the pattern of the classics, a living language was taught from standard speech whose rules were derived from the writings of recognized masters. The fact that this standard might turn out to be a contrived language did not disturb the teacher. If the living language did not follow set rules, it could not be good language. The fact that recognized writers differed in their usage did not prevent the formulation of rules. The object of modern language teaching became the creation of a series of standards each of which was inviolate. The ultimate judge of correct speech was the teacher with his book of rules, not the living language.

In this traditional type of instruction the model is the foundation of the methodology. The model is repeated orally to learn pronunciation. All the vocabulary entries of the model are extracted and memorized. The structure of the language is derived from examples given in the model, and if the examples are not sufficient, the model is padded accordingly. The student is directed to create countless little models each of which illustrates one particular point of grammar. After this long and tedious process, he is ready to turn sentences word for word from his native into the target language. The student eventually acquires the ability to piece together a new language like a jigsaw puzzle, and sometimes just as slowly.

Various types of instruction are grouped under this comprehensive term "traditional," but in actuality the difference between the types is quite marked. In this paper we shall try to describe objectively each methodology, analyzing its strong and weak points, in order to catch a glimpse of the direction of modern language teaching of the future.

The "traditional" method of language instruction is commonly equated with the grammar-translation method. Actually it is a composite of grammar-translation, direct method, reading method, philological approach, phonetic approach, and even conversational approach. In common parlance, the traditional is the method which rejects the influx of new ideas and which opponents attack as the source of all evils.

In the *grammar-translation* method language is assumed to be a standard speech derived from the usage of recognized authors. The rules for the language are deduced from observation of usage in the models. The grammarian who prepares this type of text has accumulated rules from previous observers and has tested them for inconsistencies. The rules have actually become a standard in themselves. The weakness in this method is that rules come to dictate usage instead of usage dictating rules. In this type of instruction the model is all important. Vocabulary is extracted and memorized, pronunciation is learned by imitation, and conversation is limited to questions and answers based on spoon-fed information. The student learns to construct the new language bit by bit, first by single words, then by phrases, then by sentences — but always with word-to-word translation into his native language. The process of piecing together sentences is slow and discouraging, because living language moves with the flow of ideas. Moreover, the student frequently stops his study at the point where he has just accumulated rules, and never reaches the point where he expresses ideas in the new language.

In the *direct method* the basic assumption is that the student can make better progress by dealing with only one

DEVELOPMENTS (Cont.)

language instead of two. The direct method is a full swing of the pendulum away from the translation method; the native language is completely eliminated from the classroom. The target language is presented in words and phrases which derive their meaning from observable objects or actions. The student is limited at first to that which he can observe, but in compensation he gets concentrated exposure to the new language. Pronunciation is learned by constant imitation. Vocabulary is acquired from objects in the early stages, but soon observable activity is added. Rules of grammar are learned by repeated examples and by trial and error. Interference from the native language is eliminated in speech if not in thought, but the understanding of grammatical structures may be quite laborious. The direct method is ideal when the instructor has little or no command of English, but it is awkward when he has insufficient command of the foreign language.

In the *reading method* the main objective is the ability to read and decipher, and any other ability is a by-product. Reading ability is developed through graded material in which vocabulary is increased systematically from one stage to the next. The reading material is based on carefully compiled word frequencies. Structures are introduced through a cumulative process. The reading method has a limited objective and was purposely devised to accomplish at least one objective within the meager time that schools would allow for language study. This method requires no particular speaking ability on the part of either the instructor or the student, and is frequently held up as an example of the failure of language teaching to accomplish useful results. Yet the reading approach has furnished the profession with a scientific basis for vocabulary building.

All the methods described incorporate the *philological approach*, because the historical development of a language provides the basis for the rules formulated. Vocabulary is taught by a study of cognates and by tracing phonetic developments. Structures are taught by comparison between languages and by tracing morphological developments. The philological approach develops the ability to recognize and decipher unfamiliar languages through analogy. It seldom develops the ability to express oneself fluently, because by the time a student has worked out the philological derivation, the need for expressing himself has passed by.

In the *phonetic approach* the exact physiological formation of each sound is the point of departure. Through the analysis of the formation of a sound, the student is trained to be technically exact. The sounds are treated as independent units and are not compared with the native language. In this type of approach the laboratory is used here to sharpen the hearing and train the vocal muscles to imitate a native speaker with precision. The exact description of each sound is an important part of the training. The phonetician is a scientist because he is dealing with exact, measurable factors. The only difficulty is that language, being a living organism, ceases to function properly when it is dissected for observation.

The *conversational approach* takes its departure from a set of dialogue situations centered around familiar topics. Its object is to provide models of conversation which are memorized and serve as a standard of reference with replaceable vocabulary. These dialogues provide the portions of living language which exemplify grammatical structures. Grammar is taught inductively by referring to the dialogue exchanges and then providing additional exercises illustrating rules. The weakness in this method is that model dialogues constitute only a minute part of the total range of language, and the student finds it difficult to extend beyond the limited range. In spite of impressions to the contrary, the conversational approach was in existence long before the present generation.

The so-called "traditional" approach, therefore, may be any combination of the approaches described, since these were all in existence before the movements which have been termed in sequence: aural-oral, structural linguistic, audio-lingual, new key, or fundamental skills methods. The basic change which has come over the profession is the change in emphasis. The Second World War pointed out dramatically the inadequacy of language teaching for communication. It is trite to reiterate that new methods had to be developed under pressure and that the research of structural linguists pointed the way to a new direction. The Education Act of 1958 established this new direction on a national scale and language teaching can never fall back on its comfortable routine. What is important to note is that language teaching is based on technology which was not previously available, and any approach which does not change accordingly fails to utilize all the available learning facilities. The real distinction between traditional and modern approach is the utilization or disregard of new developments. These new developments have affected not only methodology, but the very objectives of modern language teaching. If, in view of changed objectives, language teaching were to remain the same, there would be real cause for alarm.

Studies on the nature of language have made great strides in recent years. The reason for their unusual progress is that they have investigated languages which were unencumbered by traditional rules, and therefore they were able to extricate the scientific nature of language from preconceived notions. Linguistic studies are now based on the total range of meaningful sounds and not just the limited range of major European languages. Grammatical structures which were considered essential to the nature of all languages were found to apply only to those which had been observed. Studies were undertaken to isolate the grammatical structures of one language from those of another. The exact function of all the components of a language has been studied in a new light. This scientific analysis has necessitated new terminology wherever traditional terminology was not appropriate to the exact function. As a matter of fact, scientific studies on the nature of language are only in the early stages. Language teaching of the future must be attuned to this research and keep pace with its new conclusions.

The psychology of language learning has led to a reconsideration of the optimum objectives for each age level. It has led to discoveries of improved methods for acquiring new sounds, detecting and correcting fallacies, acquiring vocabulary and grammatical structures, developing understanding and reading efficiency. At the root of these new methods is the concept of gradual increment of small portions of language each of which is still a living organism. This is the basis of the pattern drill technique which permeates all new methods. It is the technique of programmed learning applied to the components of language.

The profession must recognize that the present stages are only the beginnings of a revolution in language learning. The reason why new methods have such vigorous proponents as well as opponents is that language is so complicated that it cannot be reduced to simple formulas. The ideal method will be reached only when improvements are made in teaching all the com-

ponents of a language according to their value in the total language and the objectives of language teaching. Let me explain.

I think no one would question the value of vocabulary in language learning. The question comes as to which is the most efficient way of learning it, what proportion should be acquired from day to day, what sequence should be followed, how vocabulary can best be retained, and how it can best be used for speaking and understanding. When a method speeds the learning of a vocabulary at the expense of grammatical structures, the total language becomes unbalanced and the learning process is delayed. When a method omits the cultural values of a language, it takes language out of its natural habitat and the learning process is slowed down. When, on the other hand, cultural values are overemphasized at the expense of communication, the main purpose of language learning is undermined.

In recent years methods have been developed for improving each aspect of language learning, and now we are in the process of amalgamating all of these aspects into improvement of the learning of the total language. Linguistic studies and new technology have placed at the disposal of the profession a range of possibilities. We have mentioned the fields opened up by linguistic research; now let us look at the possibilities of new technology. At the present stage you are already able to hear language continually in a laboratory and record and compare; you are able to study graphically the formation of a sound, you are able to compare different types of speech instantaneously, you are able to see and hear a master lecturer over a closed circuit; in fact you are able to expand a classroom electronically so as to enter right in the midst of a foreign atmosphere. All of this progress has been made in less than a generation. As you project forward to a generation from now, you can catch a glimpse of the language teaching of the future. If, in view of these developments there are some who still feel that modern language teaching has no reason to change its direction, education itself has not left a mark on their thinking.

It is a risky business to attempt to forecast the future, but in planning publishing programs one has no other choice. A complete publishing program materializes five to ten years after it has been conceived, and circumstances force one to outguess the future.

In the language methods of the future the main objective of language for communication will remain paramount, first because such is the nature of language, secondly because this is the most important function of a foreign language in modern society, and thirdly because a departure from this objective would mean a return to near-disaster in language study. However, language for communication cannot be the only objective, otherwise the value of language study might well be questioned in a system of education. After all, good waiters in the better European restaurants do have facility for multilingual communication. The ultimate purpose of language study must be the understanding of the people, their culture, their point of view, and their contribution to this complicated world of ours. Not every language student will achieve this understanding and appreciation, but language study will develop this ability in those who can achieve it. A language is not just a tool for communication; it is the channel of expression of ideas. Each language furnishes characteristic overtones which together make up the symphony of world thought.

Language methods of the future will aim more and more toward these broader objectives. In the language methods of the future sequences of more years of study will become increasingly important, because short sequences would again lead to the futility of language study in our educational system. Language study as a mental exercise

DEVELOPMENTS (Cont.)

is not only questionable in theory, but the amount of knowledge needed in modern society leaves no room for subjects which do not produce measurable results. The length of sequences will be controlled by various considerations. At present language sequences begin variably at the first, third, fifth, seventh and ninth grades, with variations in between. The profession seems to be concentrating on the seventh grade level as a beginning, with extension up to the eleventh and twelfth grades. Beginning at the third or fourth grade level seems to be losing ground. I venture to doubt that foreign language sequences of more than five or six years will ever sweep the country, but I hope I am mistaken. Foreign languages must compete for classroom time with other subject areas, and a foreign language is generally considered an adjunct to some other career. The possibility that the study of a foreign language can usurp the time of the average student for ten or twelve of his formative years does not loom very great in a country which is not surrounded by foreign cultures.

The increased length of sequences has had a detrimental effect on the so-called "minor" languages; even German seems to have suffered from longer sequences in French and Spanish. As for Italian, Russian, or Portugese, the effect is quite evident. And as for the rare languages, which are so sorely needed for international communication, they are being relegated more and more, to special groups. The hope of the profession that increased language study would provide *more* speakers of *more* languages is striking snags. What is happening is that the study of the so-called "minor" languages is moving out of the high schools into the colleges. In the major languages, college study has become more concentrated and courses are based more and more on the assumption that entering students are better prepared. Majors in languages do have longer sequences than those of a generation ago. There is still lack of coordination and there is overlapping between high school and college courses, but the language teaching of the future will not neglect this problem.

The different levels of instruction are naturally interdependent on methodology. Let us review briefly the new methods. Audio-lingual or new key methods have radically changed the approach in the majority of schools and colleges. New methods have justly directed language study toward understanding and speaking as first objectives. In doing so, they have tended to produce automatons who can perform beautifully within a set range, but who are limited in their ability to move out of that range. Once a student leaves the framework of his course, he is as much at loss as the generation which learned grammatical rules, even though he is on the right track. The problem is to combine all objectives so as to produce a *complete* language. The methods of the future will strive increasingly to provide training in all fundamental skills, within a cultural framework. Fundamental skills are inextricably tied into each other at all stages. They cannot be taught separately and then combined mechanically. It is as if a doctor studied the ailments of different parts of the body without relating them to the whole body. The formula for the proper proportion of each skill at any stage is subject to continuous investigation and improvement. There has been a tendency in recent years to feel that the proper formula had been reached, and all that was needed was to apply it on a national scale. Some strong proponents still feel this way, particularly if they do not know languages, but on the whole, confidence in the formula has been shaken and the profession is taking a new look. The methods of the future will take full advantage of new approaches, but without excluding other valid ideas simply because they antidate new movements.

The most striking changes in methodology will come from developments in technology. In this respect I feel the profession has just begun to scratch the surface of possibilities. The language laboratory of today is much improved over the laboratory of ten years ago, but it still has many limitations which electronic experts will eliminate by working in cooperation with linguistic experts. At present the laboratory tape can supply only a limited amount of recorded material; some day that amount will be tripled, quadrupled, or have no limitations. At present tapes allow practically no variations for the pause needed for student response; some day these pauses will be tailored to the needs of each student. At present the playback of a specific exercise is complicated, time consuming, and impractical; some day you will be able to go back to a taped exercise as easily as you can to a printed page. At present the facial expressions of the speaker on the tape are a mystery; some day all tapes will reproduce facial expressions as easily as they do sound. At present tape boxes take up vast shelves and the number of tapes is limited by the space available; some day you may have something like a microfilm collection of taped material on which you can locate any passage by computer. The language laboratory of the year 2000 will be to the present laboratory as the jet is to the Model-T Ford.

The language laboratory has made sound accessible to every student, and sound is the basis of language. But language is also the expression of a culture, and there are many other elements to culture. The methods of the future will reduce foreign cultures to presentable small units in the same way as they have already reduced language itself to presentable small patterns. Just as now you have pattern drills of language, some day you will have pattern drills of culture, reduced to visuals which are microcosms of culture rather than one-dimensional units out of context. Instead of being an outside observer, the student will be a participant in a foreign scene, much in the same way as a violinist can play in an orchestra in his own room by music-minus-one. The language methods of the future will recreate for each student the complete atmosphere which envelops language in its natural habitat.

Before that stage can be reached much work remains to be done. The national interest which has been aroused toward languages will provide the necessary personnel. Briefly we can visualize: 1. Continued investigation into the nature of language in general and individual languages in particular. 2. Continued investigation into the psychology of bilingualism, multilingualism, and language learning in general. 3. Continued investigation into the function of the brain in the acquisition of language. 4. Continued investigation into programmed learning, which is at the root of audio-lingual methods and language learning through the laboratory. 5. Continued investigation into the optimum levels for each stage of language learning and the correlation with curricula at all levels. 6. Determination of practical working sequences for the various levels. Together with all of these factors will come the coordination with technological progress, so that each element can be presented in the most effective way. Language learning is indeed at the beginning of a new era and, in spite of all the trials and tribulations, we should be glad that we are a part of this new movement.